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Extracts.....

...They may have a devil of a job ahead of them elbowing out the entrenched European and American designer names in international department stores – not to mention those brands' collective advertising muscle and commensurate dominance of global fashion editorial. But that said, seven years after Australian fashion took to the runway at this country's first serious international fashion trade event – Mercedes Australian Fashion Week – Australian designers appear to be building a respectable international retail profile.

Take this **London** retail snapshot from late March, a time when neither war in Iraq nor crisp weather seemed to be able to dampen the enthusiasm of London shoppers, as they swarmed the stores to see – and buy – the new Spring 2003 fashions. Any Australians in town would have noticed quite a few familiar names in Joan Burstein's nine-unit high fashion chain Browns. There are eight Australian brands on offer across London for spring: Easton Pearson, Akira Isogawa, **Katie Pye**, Leona Edmiston, Zimmermann (ready to wear) as well as Sass and Bide and PAM. Not a bad Australian tally for a retailer noted for her keen fashion eye and who is credited with "breaking" talents such as John Galliano, now the creative director of French luxury label Christian Dior.

"I still think it [Mercedes Australian Fashion Week] has got a way to go before a large number of international buyers go to Australia," says Browns' senior buyer Ivan Donovan. "But yes, it is quite a sizeable representation for a market like Australia – we have more Australians than we do have Japanese, certainly more than Russia and Brazil."

Paris had less Australians. It also seemed to be much harder hit by the war: some boutiques reporting a slowdown in store traffic and sales and several department stores advertising promotional sales in the first week of April.

A few streets away from Royalcheese, in Rue Herold, is a store with far more Australian merchandise: the latest addition to the directional Parisian high fashion chain L'Eclaireur. In fact, one-fifth of the fashion brands carried by L'Eclaireur's four stores are Australian, according to owner Armand Hadida. Buying originally just from Easton Pearson and Akira – via both labels' biannual European selling trips – Hadida finally trekked out to MAFW last May and added **Katie Pye**, Sass and Bide and Michelle Jank jewellery to his Australian fashion mix.

"Yes, Australia has become an important resource – we are going to open at the [Australian] embassy soon," quips Hadida, inside his new *Mad Max*-esque store which is housed in a former stable complex and seems to defy modern retail logic: sooty stone walls, dim lighting, rusted industrial antiques, meat hooks as coat hangers and no traditional signage or shopfront – just an old wooden door and discreet doorbell. Over at the better-lit, but no less dramatically furnished, L'Eclaireur flagship store in the Marais district, there were two merchandising racks over two floors devoted to the same labels.....

End.